

## I. The Principle of Change

My mother was lonely after my dad died, and it came around in time that she found a nice guy. In fact, I won him to Christ. I liked him; he was a nice guy, and they got remarried. That marriage did not last very long; it did not work. Looking back on it now, I will tell you why a lot of situations, and I know why it did not work in this situation, anyhow.

My mother has never changed in 50 years. She is the same now as she was back then. She will never change. The guy she married, he was not going to change. The reason why it did not work is because neither one of them was going to change. They were set in their ways. The bottom line is, my mother was going to do things the way she did them, and he was going to do things the way he did them. When you get hot air and cold air, they will meet about 45,000 feet. You know what you get? You get a storm.

I look back at that and I think to myself, that is part of the problem. That is why we get into trouble with God. When you start in the Bible, all the way back in the book of Genesis, it says, "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." There is never a place in the Bible where you find the Holy Spirit of God is not moving. That is the first place you find the Holy Spirit of God in the Bible, and there is no place from that point where you find that the Holy Spirit of God ever stops and rests.

The only place the Holy Spirit of God will stop and rest is when Christ comes back and establishes the millennium. In Christ, there is the rest. There is the rest for you and me, and there is the rest for Israel. Why? Because the Holy Spirit of God is in a fixed spot in Jerusalem. He is not there now. During this period of time that we are talking about, He is constantly changing and doing things according to His plan.

Now, we have two options with that as God's people. We can move and change with it, or we can not change with it and become, like most churches, unfortunately, stale, stagnant, and very caught up in the tradition of things, but never really going to ever try to accomplish anything because they will not change.

I believe one of the reasons why there is so much turmoil in the book of Acts is because God was initiating a great change. You find there is a great controversy that breaks out with the Christians in Jerusalem and the Christians at Antioch. Part of it is because God is totally changing things, and nobody in Jerusalem really understands it. Suddenly, here are all of these missionary trips going around the world where these Christians down in Jerusalem had the mindset that, "Okay, the New Testament has come, Christ has now come, but nothing really has changed." It was all changing. In your life and my life, if you are going to be productive for God, you have got to be able to change.

## II. Samuel's Call and the Old Testament Context

If you have your Bibles this morning, turn back to 1 Samuel chapter 3. I am going to read this whole chapter because this is where we are going to start this morning, and then we are going to kind of put it together from here.

*1 Samuel 3:1-21*

*1 And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*

*2 And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;*

*3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep;*

*4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.*

*5 And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.*

*6 And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again.*

*7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.*

*8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.*

*9 Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.*

*10 And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.*

*11 And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.*

*12 In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.*

*13 For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*

*14 And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.*

*15 And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.*

*16 Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.*

*17 And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee, hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.*

*18 And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.*

*19 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.*

*20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.*

*21 And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.*

Father, we thank and pray for the Lord Jesus. Lord, I love You this morning, and I thank You, Father, for the men and women that You brought here today. Thank You for our church. I thank You, Lord, for allowing us in these last days to build a church that is based on the Bible, that the preaching, the teaching, and Lord, everything we do, we just base it on the Word of God.

Lord, I thank You for the last couple of years, the men and the women that You brought into our church, young, old, the young people, the young men, the young ladies. I just thank You, Father, for the couples, for all of them, Lord, for truly, Lord, I know, as we will see before this day is out this morning, all of us know why You have done that. Help us, Lord, to put the thoughts together today. Help me, Father, help me to lay out what You put in my heart, Lord, because I do not have any way of doing it without Your Spirit, and I need You this morning. I need You to help me convey the message, and I need You to have these people listen clearly. Lord, I need them to hear today what I have to say, or what You have to say through me. Lord, we will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name. For His sake, we ask it. Amen.

If you are into marking special places in your Bible and putting things together, this is one for you. You are going to want this one. There are some places in the Bible that it is like God lifts them out of the Old Testament context that they are in and sticks them right into our lives so that you cannot miss the New Testament principles.

You know the story leading up to what I just read. We have Hannah in the preceding chapter. Hannah is barren; she does not have a child. Hannah is one of the seven barren women in the Bible. All of those seven women who do not have children right away are pictures of the nation of Israel that do not produce any fruit. Then, at a time when they have an encounter with God, they bring forth a man child who is a picture of the nation of Israel. She does that; it is Samuel. So you know the story: she has no child, and she prays to the Lord, and she gets a child.

Here is what she does: she takes that child and she takes it down to the temple. She gives that child to the high priest, Eli. She basically says to Eli, "Here is my child. I asked God for this child, and God gave me this child. Because God answered my prayer, I have given the child back

now. So Eli, he is my child, but I am giving him to you. I want you to train him to be God's man." That is what she has done.

Samuel, to pick up our story here, is down here in the temple, and he is kind of learning the ropes. He is not a priest yet; he is just a young guy, and his mother said, "You are going to serve God." She turned him over to Eli and said, "He is God's; I am giving him to God. You are the man of God, you take him." What we have here is an incredible picture.

I know that the book of 1 Samuel is in the Old Testament. I know that. I know what I have told you all along, how that directly, this is all dealing with the nation of Israel. Directly, Samuel is a picture of the nation of Israel. I know that. I know we are not dealing with the kingdom of God here; we are dealing with the kingdom of heaven. I know that they have no Bible back here other than the Old Testament that they have. I know that there is no Holy Spirit of God indwelling anybody back here like it is in you and I. I know that there is no church back here in the sense of the church that we have today in the New Testament. I know all that. I know all of this is to the nation of Israel directly.

But I am telling you, this is one of these places in the Bible where that direct application may be to Israel, but the indirect application, wow, you have got exactly how God operates in your life and my life. It shows me how, as a pastor, I am supposed to deal with the men and women that God brings into my life that are serious about serving God. At the same time, it shows you the format as a young man or a young lady, or a mom or dad, I do not care who we are, it shows you exactly the way you need to be and how you need to view this. It is an incredible, incredible, incredible story.

You know, and we talked about this when we came through the book of Philippians. We know Philippians 1:6, that great verse says:

*Philippians 1:6*

*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

Simply put, when God saves you, God saves you for a purpose. We do not play a lot of games around here. We simply talk about the fact that God saves you; He saved you for a reason. Will I let a young man or a young lady, or a mom or dad get saved, spin their wheels for a while to find themselves? Absolutely. When you come down and say to me, or you get saved, am I going to say, "Well, bless God, brother, you are saved. Come on, you need to go down here and do this"? No, I am not going to do that. I am going to help you, give you all the space that you need. But I want you not to be under any delusion. God saves you for a purpose, and God saves you for a reason.

I do not know of any place in the Bible, even in the New Testament, I do not know of any concise place that actually shows you and I the process by which me, the pastor, is to get you, the Christian, to the place where you are ready to do something for God. I do not know of any place. I have got to be the first to tell you, this is one of the strangest chapters in all of the Bible. I am going to tell you why.

Before we look at this, I want to show you a couple of things here. Look at verse one. Verse one says:

*1 Samuel 3:1*

*And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*

I do not know what you know about the Bible, but in the Old Testament, God revealed Himself or gave answers to the nation of Israel three ways. The way you get it, you come to Thursday night Bible study, and I will answer it for you. The way you get it, as you come Sunday morning and you hear the Word of God, you go home and study the Bible, the Holy Spirit of God is living inside you. Like we talked about last week, the Word of God is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. The Holy Spirit of God illuminates the answers that you need. You have a struggle, a trial in life, you go to the Bible, and when you read the Bible, through the promises in there, God gives you your answer.

He did not do that back in the Old Testament. They did not get the answers from God the same way you and I do. Do you know why? In the Old Testament, He does not dwell in everybody back there. He answers them three ways, one of three ways.

1. He answers them, first of all, like He does many of the people, He gives them a vision. Within that vision, God appears to them, and God will give His answer to the vision. We do not have any visions today, other than Sony or Mitsubishi. We do not have any visions of God. If you are driving down the street and you see a vision up in heaven and God tells you to go do this, you probably better not do it because I do not think it is probably God. We do not have any open visions today.
2. The second thing that He did is He spoke through the prophets. God gave them a man. That man got the direct message from God, and then he went to the whole nation and said, "Hey, look, here is what you are going to get." He did in a larger sense what I do in a smaller sense. When God gives me a message, I come to you, my church. I do not go to the world. I come to a group of people that God has put us together, and I give you that message. Back then, they did not have that. They had one nation. That one nation, maybe God at one time had one man. Sometimes He had multiple men at the same time, and they are geographically located in different places. God gave those men a message, and those men went to the literal nation of Israel and said, "All right, listen up. Here is what God wants." That is the way He did it.
3. The third way He did it was a strange little object found in the back of the Old Testament called the Urim and the Thummim. The Urim and the Thummim, you think it is hard to say, it is even harder to understand in the Bible, but it is one of these things that the high priest had in his breastplate and what he wore over his clothes. It is something where every time some leader of Israel has a question, they go and they actually ask this Urim and Thummim the question, and God gives them the answer through it. Kind of like a ham shortwave radio, that is not what it is.

When you find all of the stuff that is given to the high priest back there, you will find that God gives them plans and shows them how to make everything except the Urim and the Thummim.

No man made that. That is something that God brought down at some point and said, "Here, I am on frequency F, put this on." That is how they used it. It was not made by man. That was something that God made and God gave them.

Now here is a circumstance where the Bible says there is no open vision. It is very weird. He is not answering them through visions. He is not even answering them through the Urim and the Thummim. There is no mention of it here. He is not answering it through the prophets.

Verse 21, and you have got to see this, the opening verse and the last verse, lay this down. It says:

*1 Samuel 3:21*

*And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.*

There it is. In other words, here is what we have got. I do not understand this. This is a violation of everything that should be in the Old Testament. Here is a place where God, who has already said, "I am going to operate by visions, I am going to operate by the prophet, or I am going to operate by the Urim and the Thummim," has suddenly decided not to do that anymore. Now He is doing it the way that He should not do it. He is revealing something to somebody through the Word of God, when he does not even have the Word of God. You know what we have got here? You have got a picture of the church age.

### III. Shiloh, The Lamp, and The Ark: Pictures of the Church Age

That is not all. Look where it revealed it from, in Shiloh. You know what Shiloh is? Everybody thinks Shiloh is a place. Well, it was, but there is more to it than that. The first place you find Shiloh showing up, Genesis 49. Shiloh was Christ. Shiloh was Christ, as here in Genesis 49:10, "until Shiloh come," that is Christ. Shiloh may have been a place, but Shiloh in the Bible is defined as the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in Genesis 49:10.

Not only that, the Bible says, "And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord." You know what that is telling me? You know how the Word of God is revealed to you? You have got to get in Christ first to get the Word of God revealed to you by the Holy Spirit of God. So here is a guy in the Old Testament that it gets revealed when he is in Shiloh, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit of God. You know what you have got? I will tell you what you have got. You have got a picture of the church age that you and I are living in right now, and God is showing you, young man, He is showing you, young lady, how God wants to reveal Himself to you. He is showing me as your pastor what to look for in that concept. Great passage.

Why stop here? Let us go on. You know what Shiloh means? Shiloh means "peace giver," a type of Christ. Here is a place where God reveals Himself in Christ, Shiloh, through the Word of the Lord.

That is not all. Look at 1 Samuel 3:3:

*1 Samuel 3:3*

*And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep;*

Now there are a couple of things there. First of all, notice that Samuel seems to be sleeping right in the same room with the ark of God. That is incredible. If he is not directly in the same room, he is in close enough proximity that both of them are, you are told, in the same sentence. You know what that Ark of the Covenant is? That is a picture of Christ. It shows me that Samuel is as close to God as he can get at this time in his life. Young men or young ladies, I am just going to tell you something: that is absolutely vital if you are going to find out what God wants you to do in your life. You have got to get as close to that Ark as you can. That Ark is a type of Christ.

Then I will show you something else. It says down there in 1 Samuel 3:3, "and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple." The lamp of God, you know what that is from our past studies? That is that seven-pronged candlestick that you have over there in Exodus 25. When you went into the temple, it was completely dark. The showbread was over here, and the seven-pronged candlestick was over here, and it was lit, and it lit everything that man, the priest, had to do to do the work.

The only problem is this: we are told in Leviticus 24:2 that that lamp was never to go out. It was filled up with olive oil, and that olive oil made that seven-pronged candlestick work. You notice how it is called a candlestick singular, but when you get into studying it, it is seven distinct candlesticks. Do you know why that is? Because that is a picture of the Holy Spirit of God, and He is one person, a candlestick, but there are seven attributes to Him. That is why. That candlestick is never to go out. The priest is told part of his job is to make sure that the last thing he does before he leaves that night is to fill those; they are to burn forever. Why? Because it is a picture of the Holy Spirit of God, that which never rests, which never stops.

But in this story about Samuel, a man where there is no open vision, in a time where there is no open vision that God is revealing Himself through the Word of God in Shiloh, we find that the lamp of God goes out. Do you know why? Because what you have got here, ladies and gentlemen, if you want to put it in perspective, what you have got here is a picture of God dealing with you and me as men and women in Christ in the Laodicean church period where the lamp of God has gone out. Wow. I got goose pimples running up the back of my neck when I said that. That is what you are dealing with here.

This is a picture, I know of no better place in the Bible, no better place in the Bible, that shows the process of God calling Samuel into the ministry, and it is the greatest example for us. I will tell you what, not everybody in here is going to pastor, but everybody in here that is saved needs to become a minister. You need to minister the Word of God. First to your wife if you are married, wife to your husband, and then you are supposed to minister to your family. From there, you go out down the line, just like you have been taught. What you see here is the progression of his life as God calls him and God develops him. That is what we have got to see, the process,

because you have got to see that before I tell you how we are going to do and what we are going to do this fall.

## IV. The Process of Spiritual Growth

When you go over to the book of Proverbs, and boy, the book of Proverbs is a great book. When you get all the book of Proverbs together, and when you learn the book of Proverbs, you are going to have, Proverbs 1:1-6 tells you some things that will take place in your life. First of all, the Bible says that when you get it down, you will know wisdom. The Bible says you will receive instruction. I like that because you see it does not just say you will have wisdom; it says you will know wisdom. That means you will know real wisdom when you see it. If you know real wisdom, then you know you are smart enough to know, because if you have got real wisdom, you better take instruction because that is how you learn. See how it works? Then he says to understand a proverb. Then he says that a man, a young man, will get knowledge. He will get discretion, and he will get discernment. Those are the things that happen in your life as you grow spiritually.

Samuel at this point in his life represents almost every one of us in here, with notable exception. Most of us are coming to the place where you are really plugging into the Word of God for the first time in your life. Some of you have been around forever, and I am not talking about you. I am talking about the ones that God has brought in. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that because that is exactly what it is all about.

But you remember in 2 Peter 1, when we talked about 2 Peter, I told you in verse five that it was things that you needed to add to your faith. We talked about virtue. We talked about temperance. We talked about godliness. We talked about brotherly kindness. We talked about charity. We talked about knowledge. We talked about patience. You see, after you get saved and you are where Samuel is, who is beginning to get his feet on the ground, he is in the place of service for God. He is under a man of God who is instructing him, but he does not yet have the discernment. He does not yet have the ability to have discretion, discernment. He does not yet understand all of the aspects of growing up in the Lord.

Yet, as we see in this chapter, there is a process of spiritual growth that simply gets you from the natural to the supernatural. It gets you living from the natural life by which you do things in a natural way to a supernatural life where you do things God's way. The whole Bible is built on that concept. The whole Bible is built on a wise man versus a foolish man. The wise man is a man that finds God in all the principles of God and puts them in his life. The foolish man is one who goes through his life without discernment, without discretion, without knowledge, without wisdom. That is where we are at.

When God put it in my heart to start this church, I told God this: I said, "You know what? I am going to do it, but I am not going to do it the way it is supposed to be done. I am going to do it the way You want it to be done." I am not interested in you coming to church every Sunday morning and just learning the Bible. I am not interested in that. It has to go beyond that. You

have to not just know the Bible; you have to learn how to use the Bible that you know. You have to learn how to use it. Me giving it to you will never do you any good.

I can give you a set of golf clubs, but that does not make you a golfer. I can go out and buy you a grand piano, spend \$100,000 on a grand piano. That does not make you a pianist. There is nothing that I can just go into and give you that makes you what that is. I can go out and buy you a 100,000 wide margin Bible. I give everybody Bibles with gold printed letters in it. It does not make you know the Bible. You have to learn more than just knowing the Bible; you have to learn how to use it.

That is where Samuel is at. Samuel is right where so many of you are at. It is the most exciting time of your life. It is the greatest time of your life. It is the time of your life when the excitement level ought to be at fever pitch. I see that. I see that with the men and women that just cannot get enough of the Bible. It is like the lights are on, man. All you want to do, everybody you talk to. My phone rings from morning to night with people telling me, "Hey, I just talked to so-and-so, and this is what he said, and this is what I said." I never get tired of hearing that. I never get tired taking those phone calls. Why? Because that is what it is supposed to be. You are learning the process of not just knowing it, but you are learning how to use it.

With all that in mind, let us take a look at this great study. In 1 Samuel 3:3-4, we have God beginning to touch Samuel's life. All the elements are in place. He is in the place of God's worship. He is with the man that is in charge of all God's program. His mother has brought him down and dumped him off at the door. Dumping him off at the door, she says, "God gave him to me, now I am lending him back to God, take him, make him God's man." The neat thing is, she was right. God had plans for Samuel. Samuel becomes one of the greatest leaders that Israel ever has in the early ages. That is why it is so important because I know this is going to happen. I see it happening already. You begin to grow spiritually, and you begin to have a collision with your natural feelings and emotions versus the spiritual emotions that God is trying to bring in.

I will tell you what it is like. My kids, when they were four, five, six, seven, eight, nine years old, they were just one of those kids in the world. But every kid, when he hits that magical age of about 12 or 13, when those hormones start kicking in, when they are not an adult yet, but they are not a child anymore, they are in that transition period where their emotions are up and they are down. They are doing, saying dumb things. They look dumb. Their body has not caught up with everything yet. They are walking down through the kitchen, but their knuckles are dragging on the ground because their arms are longer than their legs. This is when everything that is breakable in your house needs to be packed away because they will break it. This is where they bump into things, like the front door. This is when they think dumb. This is when they do. It is not time to run them to a mental health expert. It is time to understand that here it is: two collisions here. They are coming through life now when their bodies are changing, their emotions are changing, all the things that kick in that make them a viable adult are now starting to, somebody is in there opening up the valves, but they are still playing with dolls. They are still, I mean, they will talk about themselves about guys, but if you will say to them, "Is he your boyfriend?" they are running high. They are not there yet. They have got a collision of being a child and being an adult, and they are in that twilight zone between the two. They want to think

like an adult. They want to wear adult clothes. This is where they want to get into the makeup scene, and this is where you have got to really be careful, and this is where you have got to understand where they are at. You do not take them at 14 and make them look like they are 20. There is a balance here. You are supposed to be smarter than they are. You have got to just balance that all out. I mean, she looks like she has stepped out of the house, and mom and dad let her dress like she is 20, but she goes home and she plays with her baby doll. That is a sign that she is not there yet, and a parent is supposed to be in touch with that.

That is what happens with every child of God when you get saved. You come to that point where God begins to speak to you. He begins to speak to you about things in your life, people in your life, circumstances in your life. He begins to invoke ideas into your life that you did not have before, and you do not know what to do with them. So it can be a very bad time, or maybe something will happen in your family or in your relationship life or whatever, and you will not know how to deal with it. You will look at it because you are not there where you can just say, "Okay, she left me, there is the verse, better is she gone than she is there." There is the verse. You cannot do that yet. You are not able to use it. So your emotions are caught in the middle of the thing. That is where Samuel is. That is where young Samuel is.

The Bible says in 1 Samuel 3:7:

*1 Samuel 3:7*

*Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.*

He did not know Him yet. What does that mean? Does it mean that he is down there working in a temple, and every time Eli is doing something, he says, "Who is God?" No, he knew who God was intellectually. He had heard it from his mother. He knows what is going on. He does not know Him in the way to be able to understand what God is saying to him. In other words, God has not revealed Himself yet. In other words, he is just like some of you: you got saved, you got into the Word of God, you love the Word of God. Then at some point in your life, God comes down inside, and He began to talk to you seriously about what you are doing in your life. Sometimes you do not know how to deal with it. Sometimes the confusion is based on things that you are not doing right in the first place, and God is trying to show you, but you do not know how to straighten it all out. This is a picture of a young Christian trying to put the God and the book and the ministry all together in his life when he has not yet there where he can really discern the Word of God the way he needs to.

So what happened? God calls him, He says, "Hey, Samuel." Samuel wakes up. What does he do? He thinks Eli called him. So he runs to Eli and he says, "Okay, he says, "What did you call me? You called me?" He says, "I did not call you. Lie down again." You see, he feels the call, but he does not have the discernment to know who is calling him. But he does the right thing. His mama taught him well. He goes to the man of God that God put in his life to ask him if he called him. Eli tells him, "I did not call you. Go back and go back to sleep."

Then in 1 Samuel 3:6, Eli gets the second call. He is confused. He feels the call, but he does not discern the call. He goes to Eli a second time and he says, "Hey, you called me." You see, that is a picture of you beginning to grow in the Word of God, beginning to learn the Bible, and then the Holy Spirit of God beginning to do something in your life, but you are not sure what it is yet. So he runs back to Eli, and Eli says, "I did not call you."

Now the wisdom of Eli in this is my part of the story. He tells him to go back to sleep. Sleep is a type of rest in the Bible. You know what he is doing? Eli does not know for sure what God is doing either, but it is okay because Eli is smart enough to know that he does not have to know. I do not know what God is doing in your life when you come to me and you ask me these things. I do not know what He is doing. I just know to tell you to keep on doing what you are doing, and in time, God will reveal Himself exactly to you, and we will go to the Bible and we will work it out together. Do I know what God is doing in all your life when you start to get the twinges or the feelings or you start to deal with this? I mean, I can go down and show you processes in your life, but the bottom line is at the end of the day, I do not know yet what God wants to do with most of you, but I do not need to. You do not need to worry about it either. When you start to feel that call, you need to keep doing what you are doing in this church under my leadership as your pastor because that is how God is going to reveal it to you. It is as simple as that.

Let me show you how this works in most churches. Joe gets saved. Joe comes to church for four or five months. Joe begins to grow. Joe gets excited about God. Joe comes down in the service, or Joe comes over and calls me, or we give an invitation, and Joe is broken up because Joe has made the commitment that he wants to do what is right, and God is moving in his life, and he is not sure what that is. So because of the emotional aspect of the thing, and he cannot deal with it anymore, he comes down front, kneels down there, and he talks to me or comes over to me and he says, "Bob, God has called me to preach," or "God has called me to this," or "God has called me to that." "God has called me to that. I do not know what God is doing. I just know my life is upside down, and I have got this terrible burden in my life, and I have got this and I have got that, and I am dealing with this, and I just know God has changed my life so radically, and I want to do what is right. God is moving in my life. Here I am."

You know what happens in most churches? "Bless God, son. God has called you to preach. Bless God, son. God called you to be a missionary. Bless God, son. God has called you to do this. God called you to do that. Bless God, God has called you to mow the grass, paint the church. God, God, you come to me, I will show you. I will put you in the, I will show you how that thing is. God has called." You know what they do? They will send you off to some Bible college, and they will take you who does not really know what you are doing at the most crucial time in your life and ship you off someplace to somebody that does not know you, really does not care about you, has no personal interest in you other than you are a name and a number and a financial record of keeping that school open, and they are going to dump on you whatever they give everybody, and you are going to get no personal attention to what your specific need is by the man who ought to know what God is doing in your life than anybody else because it is the man that God puts you under.

When Kelly was nine years old, she wanted to be a fireman. Did I go out and buy her a fire truck? Yes, as a matter of fact, I did. That is what I am saying. You do not know, you cannot know. There are seven stages of spiritual growth that a pastor has to walk you through, and somewhere in the process, God will show you exactly what He wants you to do. So what does he say? He says, "Go back and lay down again. Go back to sleep. Keep doing what you are doing, and in time, God will reveal it."

Then he comes the third time, says Samuel, 1 Samuel 3:8:

*1 Samuel 3:8*

*And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.*

A little different this time. "And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child." What is the difference? Oh, I love the Bible. What is the difference? Why did he come the first two times, and Eli said, "Go back to sleep," but this time it is different? This time, Eli perceived that God has called the child. I will tell you why. Because in God dealing in men and women's lives, there is a pattern. As a pastor, you ought to know that pattern. When you see the pattern begin to develop, Eli still did not know what he wanted to do. Eli told him to go back to sleep again. But this time, Eli, when he laid his head on his belly, he said, "Yep, God is obviously moving in that boy's life." He knew. He knew there is a systematic, systematic pattern of everything in the Bible. If you think there is not a systematic pattern that I do not look for in your lives, when you begin to get in that book, that I do not watch what God is doing in your life and how you are growing, and I see the key ingredients in there, I am telling you, there is a natural pattern when God begins to deal in a man's life. Your traits, your character, your job may be different in the end result, but the way that God deals with you is the same. When you know the pattern, you see it.

## V. God's Pattern of Threes

For this case here, number three in the Bible is the order of the way God does things. How many times have you heard the expression, "Third time is a charm"? In this case with Eli and Samuel, it was. My mother used to tell me growing up when somebody died in a family or died in neighborhoods, she used to say, "Well, there are two more, they will always die in threes." My family died in sixes. But she said, "They always die in threes." How many have ever heard that? "Well, we die in threes." Because there is an organized pattern by God in things, and when you figure out all the patterns, you figure out God.

In Romans 1:19-20, God told us that the invisible things from the creation, that we cannot see, are clearly seen by the things that God made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so we are without excuse. You know what that tells me? That tells me one day back there in eternity past when God was going to create everything, He kind of walked out on the banisters of heaven and looked over there in a great expanse of space, and He said, "Well, today is creation day, I am going to make it all." Michael, the archangel, was standing there and said, "Well, Lord, this is really going to need, this is going to be a great fireworks display. Do You have a plan?" God

says, "Yeah, I have a plan." He says, "Well, what plan? What pattern are You going to use?" He said, "I am going to use Myself as a pattern." Michael said, "What do You mean?" He said, "Well, I am a Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I am the most perfect pattern there is. Why would I use any other pattern than a perfect pattern to make the pattern for everything out there that I want to make?" Michael said, "Is that in the Bible?" Lord says, "It will be."

You know what God did? God made everything in a pattern of threes. God is a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So when He made man, He made man with a body, soul, and spirit. When you want to talk about the complete title of God the Son, it is the Lord Jesus Christ. When you want to study your Bible, it is doctrinally, inspirationally, historically; it is three. When you look at the Old Testament, it is broken down into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The New Testament into the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles. It is always three. You look at your calendar, you look at history, it is past, present, and future. You have a husband and wife, but they are not a family until the third compartment shows up, and that is a child. Now there are three. Two and two is incomplete until the third thing shows up, which is six. What did I say, two or three? Well, the answer shows up. I do not know. It is just the way that it is.

When you look at all the things around you, you have three things. You have the air, you have the land, and the sea. When the sun puts off rays, it puts off X-rays, light rays, and heat rays. I mean, I do not know when you start to deal with electricity, it is positive, negative, and neutral. You have the Army and the Navy and the Air Corps. What else can I do? It is three. Everything breaks down in three. It is the pattern. You have three kingdoms: animal, vegetable, and mineral. Why? Because God made everything, and that is a pattern. So when Eli saw the third time, he said, "Ooh, something to this." Why? He knew the pattern that never fails. I am not saying you come to see me three times; I am not talking about that. What I am saying is there is an orderly pattern to everything that God does. Learn the pattern, know when God is in it.

This is where God finally reveals Himself to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:10-21. God basically says, "I am going to use you in time. You are going to shut the nation of Israel on its ear, and boy, you are going to be used of God. But right now, stay put, learn, get experience, let the man that I put you under help you get involved in his ministry. I will bless you through that. I will grow you through that."

I want you to see that. I want you to note the key to Samuel's success in his growth. There are two things, 1 Samuel 3:19:

*1 Samuel 3:19*

*And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.*

Two things:

4. First of all, it was the man of God that God put into his life. God grew him through the ministry of Eli because that is where God had his mom drop him.
5. The second thing was that old Samuel let none of his words fall to the ground.

I am going to tell you something, kids. I cannot tell you how important those two things are. The second one especially. You have to hang on to every word God gives you. I know you are doing it. I know, I see it. I am telling you, some of you just blow my mind. All you, I mean, when we get together, when we talk, and we are all out there, I know we talk both, but I hear somebody talking about the Bible over here, or somebody over here, their witness is doing work. It is what it takes. What you see is men and women who are coming to the place that they realize that the success of your growth is when you get those books of the Bible and the Word of God, you just do not let those words fall to the ground. That is the process.

## VI. The Church's Multifaceted Ministry

Now that you understand that basic fundamental process, I am sure at this point you can see yourself at some point of your spiritual growth where you are at in this scenario. The scope and the focus of our ministry, and I told you this many, many times, it is multifaceted. My job as a Christian and as a pastor, God has entrusted me with things. I am a steward. My job all of my life is to make the best investments for God that I can.

Somebody asked me one time, "What dictates whether you do this or whether you do that? I mean, here you have two things, Bob. You can do this in your church, or you can do this in your church. You cannot do both of them. You can only do one or the other. What dictates how you decide?" It is simple. I look at this and I say, "If I do this, I can get five things back for God. If I do this, I can get two." I do not have to pray about that because my job is to get the best investment out of your lives that I can. If I can do something with you that I can multi-dimensionally replace that thing fivefold versus twofold, that is what I am going to do because that is the job of you and me. That is what we are to do. We are to look at the opportunities of life.

Somebody says, "Well, Bob, how do I as a Christian make decisions about this?" Same way. God can get five things out of it if I do it this way, or He can get two, or He can get nothing out of it. You do not even have to think about it. Your job and my job is to make the best investments. I look at every one of you, and you know how I feel about you. Man, there is some time during the week I had to stand back on nights, and we need to put a revolving door in my house. Some of you are coming in, and some of you are going. Some of you are coming over for discipleship, and we are done, and you stand down there and talk to my kids, or they are eating dinner, and you pile in and eat dinner too. Some of you come in and head for the Twinkie box. You know where they are at, man? I tell you what, that is the way it is supposed to be. It is supposed to be the fact that I always want to be where you are at. I always want to be that you can get to me any time you need to because that is what it takes. That is the Paul and the Timothy mindset. That is the Eli and the Samuel mindset. That is exactly what we are supposed to do.

Yet at the same time, I am going to be honest with you. I understand, and I told you this a couple of Thursday nights ago, I understand why some people come and do not stay. I am not saying I am perfect, and I have got a lot of faults, but let me tell you where one thing that I do not have any faults in in this one area, and that is the way I convey truth. I am going to lay it out right the way it is. I do not have the problem of being timid when it comes to truth. If I err anywhere, I

probably err on the fact that I just dump out more than I probably need to, but you know what, hey, my life first, as old 1 Kings 22:14, old Micaiah, he said, "As the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak."

I do not do you any favors coming here and telling you something that is not the truth. I do not do you any favors by not giving you all the truth. I have got as many holes in my character and dents in my armor as anybody else, but the bottom line is when it comes to giving you the Word of God, I am not going to spare your feelings. I may do it in an appropriate way. I may do it in a subtle way. I may rip your gut from the belly button, and you go out of here carrying your intestines and saying, "Boy, that was fun today." I am telling you, that is my job. It is my job to come to the place that I give you truth, but I am not under any delusion that everybody that comes to any church, but I cannot speak for the other one, I can only speak for this one.

I know that God will use this church two ways. It will, because of the truth that is preached, not because of me, not because of my character, not because of my relationship with God, or not because of anything it has to do with me, but because of that book and the fact that it is preached, the church will automatically become a two-sided coin.

6. One, you will come here to get the truth, and God will take that truth and motivate your life to get you to the place where God wants you to be, everything God wants you to be.
7. Or God will bring you here, allow you to hear it. Then in one setting, half a setting, quarter of a setting, you will be out the door saying, "I do not want to hear that." Then God will use that as the judgment seat of Christ when you stand there and you say, "Nobody ever told me." He will just replay it back to that thing and show you the service, show you the preaching, and show the exact moment in your heart when you said, "No, thanks God, I want to do my own thing."

I believe that. I am a people person. I tell you what, somebody says, "Why do you have so many dogs?" A lady asked me last night. My answer is, "The more I am around people, the more I like dogs." That is the way it is. I am a people person; I love people. I have never met a person I did not like. I do not hate anybody. I never hated anybody in my life. I do not hate anybody today. I do not think I have the ability to hate somebody. Maybe if you hurt my family or something, we will change, but God has been so good to me and taken care of me so well, I just do not, there is no room for that in me.

I love people. I love to see people do what is right. I love to spend as much time as it takes with people around that Bible. You cannot ever wear me out. I mean, I will see people all day long. I will study my four hours in the morning, and I will come and teach Bible on Thursday night for two hours, and then I will run home, and I have got another Bible study that starts about 10 o'clock, and we go to 12. Why? People want it. I do not care; that is my job. But I am not so foolish to understand that everybody who embraces truth likes truth. That is what you have to understand. When you start dealing with people, there are some of you already have. I put you with people, you start to work with somebody, and the bottom line is, they bail out on you after the second or third time. I know you feel bad; I feel bad, but the thing you have got to understand is that is what this church is for. This church lays out truth, and you have to take it or leave it.

You have to realize that that is part of the job that God has given us because at the judgment seat of Christ, there are going to be people that are going to stand there and they are going to say, "Why did not anybody tell me?" And God is going to show them where He did. That is a hard burden to bear sometimes, especially when you are working with them one on one, but that is the way it is. That is what the ministry is. I feel sorry for the person, but I feel good because it is the truth. You are never wrong to do what is right when it comes to the Word of God.

I look at those things. From day one of our church, I have always been about two things: the Bible and people. Helping people build relationships, rebuild their marriages, rebuild their own personal lives, or rebuild their families or whatever, or just build their own walk with God. A growing ministry, a thriving ministry, a Bible-based ministry will always be about raising up leaders. It will always be about bringing men and women along who decide to embrace truth and will follow that, and in time they are going to rise to that place.

I have a few basic bedrock operating principles that are Bible-based that are non-negotiable in my life that I work from when it comes to dealing with people. I have probably 20 of them. I am not going to get into that today. You will get them in time. But from where we are at today, one of the things, and these are things that I look at, these are things that I hold myself accountable for first, and it goes from there.

The first thing is, and I believe this as much as I believe that the sun is out today and the ground is wet and the ground is hard and the water is wet, I believe this with every fiber of my body: everything, everything, everything rises and falls on leadership. Everything rises and falls on leadership. If your marriage fails, it is because somebody did not take the leadership role. If your family fails, it is because you failed as a leader. If this church fails, it is because I failed as a leader. Everything, everything, everything rises and falls on leadership. That is why the ministry is training leaders. When you train them based on the Word of God and you put them in a scenario that helps exercise their senses, bring them along, bring them to the point where they begin to grow.

With responsibility, has to come accountability. I will never put you in a place of responsibility without holding you accountable for that place because everything rises and falls on leadership. When I put you in charge of a ministry, it is your ministry. I figure by that time, you know how I work, you know what I believe, you know how I ran mine because you have been around and watched me. I am the Eli in your life. Therefore, when I give it to you, you do it just as I would do it with your own personality and your own special gifts. No problem. But the bottom line is, when you are in command, you command. When you are in charge, you are in charge. When I give you a ministry, you run that ministry. You are accountable in the structure to me and in the spiritual structure to the Word of God in God. But the bottom line is that I do not look back over my shoulder. If I put you in charge, it is because I have thought it through, and I know that you are the one. I have seen in your life those things that I need to see; that is why you are there. That is how it has to work. I just cannot stress that.

Everything rises and falls. A pastor that will not build leaders will never build a strong church. Most pastors will not build leaders.

8. One, they do not know how to.
9. Two, they would not do it if they did know how to because they are so insecure in their own relationship with God that anybody who gets any more attention than anything that you do is suddenly a threat.

Let me tell you something. I expect every man in this building and every woman in this building to learn the Bible and know the Bible and do a better job in life than I have done. I expect that from you. I do not feel threatened by anything or anybody. I am the most secure person you have ever met in your life. Do you know why? Because none of this is mine anyhow. It all belongs to God. God gave it, God can take it away, and if God can have somebody else do it better than me, I am all for it. That is why when I put you in charge of an athletic ministry and I am on your team, do not you look at me for approval when you make a choice. You make the choice. You are in command. I would not have put you in there if I did not think you could do it. I did not put you in there so you can look back over your shoulder to see if I approve. I will submit myself to you just like everybody else on the team. You put me out of the game, that is fine. You will never come over and say, "Hey son, you need to learn in life. You are going to go very far. You do not do this thing to the pastor." You are in charge, you are in charge. Whether I agree with it or not, it is immaterial. If you are going to be a good leader, you have got to be a good follower. You cannot give anybody responsibility without letting them take the accountability. That is the way it is.

The second thing: God will never give you any more in your church than you are willing to take care of. He just will not. This is where churches fail. God will never give you any more than you are willing to take care of as the pastor. We have a number of ways that we are going to do that, and we are going to talk about that in a little bit.

The third thing: As you grow up, you have to grow down. I am telling you, you can build the biggest church you ever want to build with all the people you have. But if it is not grounded in a foundation, it is broad. The base has to be as broad to support the upward movement. If it is not that way, you are going to topple over. You are going to become top-heavy. That is why churches fail. That is why they have fights. That is why they have splits. That is why they have dissension. Because they get up real big. They want everybody in their church. But the pastor does not want to train leaders. He does not want to take care of the people God gives him. He wants to build a great organization upward, but he either does not know how to or will not build down deep-wise to lay that foundation and broaden that base.

I am not so stupid that I think that you can build anything up without building it out. The Washington Monument goes up what, 300, 400 feet? It goes down 100 feet before it ever went up. You have to understand, the higher you go, the broader your base and the deeper your leadership has to be involved. We call it very simply in the theological terms, you have to grow two ways: inwardly and outwardly. Very frankly, that has been my plan for the last two plus years is we have done nothing but build inwardly. That is what we have done.

I asked God from day one, "Give me the men and the women within a two-year span that I could take that would be willing and bring them in." Some of you got in at the beginning, some of you

got in the middle, some of you got in last week. I do not care. Some of them will come in next week or the week after. That is okay. We will take them in as we come. But you who are willing and you who choose to be the Samuel will come to the point where together we will grow deep as we grow up, and you will become the basis and the foundation from where we go.

I have already done everything in my life I know how to do to put little seeds of leadership. I have run some test cases and done some things here and there. I have invested quality time in people's lives without discretion. Anybody that wants it can have it. I have chased you. I have done everything in the world to help you. I have laid out my heart to you, my love for you. I cannot do anything more. The bottom line is this: at some point in your life, you have to decide, "I am going to be a Samuel. I am going to begin to grow inwardly before I try to grow upwardly." Now what? We have laid the inward stuff, and now it is time to begin the outward. As you do the outward, you continue the inward.

A successful Bible ministry will always have to expand. It will always have to balance the inward and the outward. It always will have to be flexible. It always will have to be adaptable. It always will have to be reevaluating, reallocating, and re-standardizing what it does. It is just something that everybody that is on board has to be on board.

Most churches, they have two kinds of roles. If you went to the average church, they would find that you have, "Well, we have an active role and an inactive role." What is your active role? "Well, our active role is about 400 people." What is your inactive role? "Well, we have got 1200 people on the inactive role." The reason they do that is so when they preach and go to the fellowship meetings and they say, "How many are running, brother?" He has a good choice to pick from. He can say 400 or 1200 and not really be lying. So depending on who he wants to impress, he keeps those two things going. If Dr. Smudge comes over and he said, "Well, brother, how many are preaching? How many are winning?" And he is only running 800, you will say, "Well, brother, we have got 1200 on the rolls." Whoa, whoa, whoa. If you know somebody that is your friend and you know you cannot get away with it, you say, "Well, brother, we are running above 400." "Well, God bless you." You see, you play it. That is called political.

I have never been that way. I never look at it that way. I only have one role, and that is active. Active has nothing to do with coming to church or not coming to church. Active has to do with your attitude toward the Word of God and what you want to do with it. That is what makes you active. Nowhere in the Bible, I do not know of anywhere. There is not anywhere. Nowhere in the Word of God has God ever acknowledged a church that is not involved in ministry reaching people's lives. That takes a lot of various different routes, and I know that. I am not saying that because I know that somebody here this morning, you are just kind of finding your way along. That is great. I do not ask anybody to do anything in this church for at least a year when you start coming in. I give you that much, sometimes longer, just to get your feet on the ground. I have never pushed somebody into anything. I take the time in your life. I would just as soon spend an hour a week with you helping you answer your questions or whatever the case may be before you do anything in here. I just let you come and enjoy it. Just let you come be part of it. But just face it. At some point, you have to say, "You know what? This is my church too, and I have got to do something." Maybe it is not as much as somebody else can do. Maybe your situation is

different. I know some of you have unsaved spouses, and that does make the situation different. Some of you have situations in every situation. But more comes down to your attitude of heart of, "You know what? This is what I want to do."

One of the things we are going to have to restructure, and we have just gotten to the big enough point where we have got to do it, and it comes with our elementary division. I am going to tell you right now, I do not care what we do to the world. We can mount a missions trip in time and go to China and win the whole nation to Christ. We can come back and say we have got 16 billion people won to Christ. It will never take the place of a little kid right down that room as far as I am concerned. Do you know why? Because that is the future of our church. We can never forget them. Never. That is why I spend so much time loving on your kids. I do not want them to grow up not knowing that their pastor is not their Uncle Bob. That is vitally important. Do you know why? Because that is the way it is supposed to be. Because right now I am maybe helping you and your life in the Word of God down the line when they hit that little crazy age where they want to be a fireman too and want a fire truck. You are going to need all the help you can get, and that is what I am here for. I want my money in the bank with them already. I do not want them to come and you bring them into my house and say, "Hi son, this is Pastor Bob. You have been going to the church for 20 years, but you have never seen him and he is..." No, no, I do not want that. I want them to know everything about me as much as I know about them. I want everything in their life to be part of that. It has to be that way. It is legitimate.

Some of you have teenage boys and girls, and you are struggling with things in life. I do not just want to be their pastor. I want to be their friend. I do not want to pretend I am their friend just so I can get close to them even though I am still their pastor. I do not want that. I want a genuine them to know that I love them genuinely, that they are part of my age. When we put programs together, there are things that some of these young guys can help me do. Some of these things these young gals can help me do, and they will do it better than you older folk. Notice how I put myself in their category with the younger folks. They will just do better. I want to use every tool at my disposal. I want everybody to know there is something for you to do. I do not care. It starts when they are little toddlers, and it comes right up to their 18, 19, 20, and then they move right into the adulthood of things, and we just continue on from there. I do not care. There will never be a time that they will just be so-and-so's kid. No, they are as much my kid in my mind as they are yours for my spiritual investment that I take responsibility for them too. I do not want them to grow up and not know who their pastor is. I do not want them to grow up and not know their pastor is their friend, their buddy. I do not want them to think I am just some steroid out there that you cannot get approached to, and he wears a suit up there, but you cannot talk to him. As soon as he is done, he runs down the thing there. No, no, I want them to know that I am part of their world, and they are part of mine, and they are just as important to me as every adult in this church. If they have got an issue, that issue is number one on my plate to help them with. That is the way we have got to be. It has to start with those little kids down there right now. It has to start right now. We have grown, my goodness.

What are the things that we have done? Like I said, nobody is going into the nursery team structure until you have been around here for a year. Now there are some noted exceptions to

that. Some of you come in, and you are way ahead of most of a lot of people. You have been in churches all your life. You just come from someplace else, and I will put you to work. But when you are coming in and you are getting your feet on the ground in the Word of God, there are a lot of things you have got to balance. You are like young Samuel down there. I do not want you distracted by anything. I want one thing for you to be able to work on that is your relationship with God in the Word of God. That is me and you. I want to help you. That is all I care about right now. Everything else will take care of itself. I do not care where you are at. If you have got extenuating circumstances, they are going to work through that.

What we have done is this. Nikki and Jamie have headed it up and done a wonderful job. But it has gotten so large and it has gotten so big that we need some middle management. So what we have basically done is this: we basically broke that thing down into eight teams. We put a team leader over everyone. In other words, there is going to be a lady in charge of that whole thing, and everybody is going to work under her. In most cases, the ladies are newer ladies in the church because I want them to get the experience of working with it. Not all cases, but some of them they are. We kind of balance the thing out. We sit down and we look at this. That person is going to be in charge, and they are going to have their own team. We are going from whatever we have got now to six people on a team. It is going to take care of the extra load, and we will be able to float people in and out however we help it. It is going to be basically now that we are going to be able to restructure to the point that when we have a structured program for the children that everybody has a closer way to monitor it. You can get better help. Some of you younger ones can begin to learn how to start the basis of teaching or whatever you want as you are into that area as you grow.

Again, taking care of the kids and training moms and dads to teach them, I love it. Everywhere I go with your little kids, they are always telling me their memory verses. I think that is the greatest thing in the world. The greatest thing in the world. Except for Maddie, the other day, she comes up, singing a song, she says, "I do not know, but I have been told, Bobby Robert is getting mighty old." I did not appreciate that. That is me. Not the memory verse I was looking for. Well, she had John 1:1 down pretty good. Boy, I love that. I think that is the greatest thing in the world. Helping your children, finding out what they are doing, it is all part of the process. It is putting money in the bank.

Let me tell you something. If down in New Orleans, they would have used the money, and they would have got the help that they needed long before to shore up their levees, they would not have been flooded the way they were. I am telling you right now, those memory verses, no matter how simple they may sound, no matter how unprofound it may seem to you, is the money in the bank and the building of those levees. When the old wind and the water come to this old world, you have got something on those kids' hearts besides the things of the world. You need to help them.

We are not going to have our fall thing this year like we did last year. We had the big deal. We are going to do something special that day because of other things that we are doing. But we are going to have little gifts for them, and they are going to let them wear their little costumes. We are going to have kind of a fall festival down there for them. Thinking ahead, Christmas this year

is on Sunday. So one of the things that we are going to do is that we are going to move the service from when it is to 8 o'clock in the morning. We are going to give a chance for those that are in town to come here. We want to have a time together. I am going to get some gifts for your children. I want them to, we are going to build a whole thing around that as a family, we can come. We can have our shorter service that morning, have our Christmas time, and then everybody go home and spend the rest of the day with your family. I think it is good that you take an opportunity like that. I know Christmas what it is and all of that. But I think it is good that you take your children and you begin to say, "You know what? We go to church as a family to celebrate this time, and then we come home and open up all the special things that we have." Those are the kind of things we are going to try to do along those lines.

I am going to tell you this in conjunction with helping the flow of kids. All this is going to kick in on November 5th. That is the first Sunday in November. What we are going to do, all that you can see over here, it says Old Path Baptist Church meets here Sunday mornings at 10:30. Do you know why? Because we are moving the service back to 10:30. That is where we originally started. We kind of just crept on a little bit. But it is putting too much pressure on those workers in there to have those kids past that long into the lunch hour when they are hungry. So what we are going to do is we are going to move it back to 10:30. I am going to take all month to tell you we are moving it back to 10:30. On November 5th, we are going to start at 10:30. I am going to tell you this: if I have got four people here at 10:30, that is when I am starting the church service. The rest of you can come in whenever. I know that some of you drive a long way. I am not arguing with anybody. I am not saying. I am just saying we are going to move it back to 10:30 because we have got to help them down there. If you are against that right now, once you have your nursery shift down there, you will be the first one that wants to get it done. Because it is too long for those kids to go into the noon hour. They get hungry. They get cranky. We started at 10:30 earlier. Everything was okay. We got to let it slide and everything, and it was a convenient time. But now we have got to move it back to the place because we are hurting ourselves on the other end. That is what we have got to do.

## VII. The Athletic Outreach: A Model for Ministry

The next thing I want to talk to you about, and this is our fall outreach. The kids, that is our inward. The outward is something that I have been working on for quite a while now and just looking at it. That is our athletic outreach program. Last Memorial Day, we had our six teams where we put it all together. We had a great time. I was looking at that to see if it was possible to field six teams. We did. We come back in our own athletic program. Again, I wanted to see how we are going to go. We had four softball teams, co-ed. I watched all of that. I watched the men and the women, how they worked, how they interact, and how it all went. I have come to the place now that what we are going to do this fall is we are going to put together six volleyball teams.

Everything we do is multidimensional. We are going to get about eight or nine things out of this at the same time. We are going to put six volleyball teams together. I told you, we are going to play up at the Lee Shummon on Saturday. We are going to start at 6:30. The second game, 7:30,

8:30, 9:30. We will work it right from there, 6:30 to 9:30. I have already picked the captains and the co-captains. Starting today, we are going to fill out the application to sign up on the list. In two weeks, we are going to have a draft. We will come up short on the teams.

Here is where it comes in. I have got to teach you accountability, responsibility, and leadership. Everybody has got to learn to work together. You say, "Well, I do not play volleyball." That is the beauty of this thing. For those of you who can do it, I have got something for everybody to do, because it is going to be a total church concept. Not maybe everybody can do it. I know some of you have extended winning circumstances. If you cannot do it, I am not going to be mad at you to think you are not spiritual. That is not the case at all. This is just one opportunity. There will be another opportunity where you can fit in. There is not going to be one thing that fits everybody's needs. But we take what we can do. As we build this thing together, right now, this is what we need to do.

Listen how this thing is going to work. We start with a draft with the people in our church that want to play. The teams are going to come up short. We will probably get five or six people on a team. We are going to be probably five or six short. Then here is what happens. At that time, we have six teams. No, we do not. You said, "Bob, you have six volleyball teams." I know that is what I said, but I just admit it was wrong. We are starting six new churches. Six new churches. I have already picked the pastors. You are going to get five people. You are going to be short five. Then you are going to go into a planning session with the people that you have got. You are going to have some of your older Christians. You are going to have some of the younger Christians. You are going to be the guy that is in charge. You are going to put a strategy together to bring in people from the outside to play in those volleyball teams. You are going to begin to do the balancing act of ministry. You are going to have lost people. You are going to have people who do not go to church anywhere.

All of you right now, in fact, when we started talking about this, I hear all the time, "We have got so-and-so going to go." We were at the thing last night for Barb's work. I got out there. She said, "Well, I really want to play softball." "Yes, you can play volleyball." She said, "I love to play volleyball." She said she is going to come up. There are people out there. All you do is you bring them in, and you begin to balance the aspect of the ministry versus the game. You see, your team takes a name. Some of you will be Antioch. Some of you will be Faith Baptist. You name your church. You name your church. Now you have got a balance between a volleyball team and a ministry. Now you have got to look at everything you do and why you do it. You cannot just fly by the seat of your pants anymore. You have got to look at the people you have. You have got to look at the investments you have got to make in it. You have got to see what you have got to get out of it.

You form a prayer network with the people that are in this church that you start praying for the lost people that are on your people, the people out in church. You start to pray and love them and support them and just let the Holy Spirit of God work right down through you and bring you right into your life. It is the pattern. I am telling you, if you want to reach people, you genuinely love them, gently show them concern. Let me tell you something. This old world, it is loud. It is flashy. There is a lot of light. But it is the loneliest place on planet Earth for most people. It is the

loneliest place in the world because there is nothing real in it. You just take the time to be real in somebody's life. You take the time to love them, bring them in as a group, encourage them, play ball, take them out to eat together, do all of them.

All the things are here. All the elements of pastoring and learning leadership are in this concept. It is not just a volleyball team. It is an outreach meeting. It is a leadership training aspect. It is not just a leadership training. It is a team building concept with everybody. Everybody gets on board. You balance between the games and the ministry. You have to define different kinds of people in different ways to minister to them, the old or the unsaved, and their attitude. You have to have a strategy. You have to sit down with your people and say, "Okay, let us get together a plan." You do not just put a plan. Now you begin to pray about the plan. You say, "You know what? Let us have a time of prayer tonight. We have got a list of names here. We know that these people are either unsaved or they are not coming to church. We need you to pray." Then you have a purpose and a goal. You as a church, a team, you pray for them. You encourage them. When they come out and play, you do not beat them over the head to come to church. You do not even ask them to come to church. You just love them and be with them and be their friend. The Holy Spirit of God will do the rest. He will do the rest.

As a leader, you have to make hard decisions in dealing with people. You have to include all your people in some ways, a joint effort. You have to come up with ideas and all the aspects. It is not going to be a competition between churches or between teams. It will be as far as the game is concerned. But you captains of the team, when you come up short, some of you say, "Well, you know what? We are three guys short." Okay? All the other churches help the other people. You say, "You know what? We have got more people than we need. You take these three." You guys meet together as leaders and decide where you are going, how you are doing. Everybody has to get involved on the pastoral level that you grow to the place that you are an active part of that aspect of ministry. Everybody pulls it together. Everybody works together.

When you stay down here and say, "You have got a team, and I have got a team." And we played a 6:30 game. You know what we do? We plan some activity to go out and eat afterward where the two teams can get together. You build it on the basis of fellowship. You build it on the basis of just having a good time. You build it on the basis of not being a threatening situation. You do not even ask them about coming to church. You just basically show them Christ in your life. Show them what God has done in the midst of your life. Just do what I do. When I start meeting with people and I start to talk to them about the Bible, and they are not coming to my church, I never invite them to church. I never say, "Well, I will meet with you if you come to my church." I never say that. I could care less if they never come or not. I want them to come, but that is between them and God.

You know what I do? I just be real with them. I just show them what God has got for them and let the Holy Spirit of God do the rest. If God wants them here, He will bring them here. If He does not want them here, He will send them someplace else. But the bottom line is you are just unconditionally with no ulterior motive loving somebody and bringing them to the place where you show them what the Lord has given you. It becomes a natural relationship, a natural bond, a

natural platform. You know what it is going to do? Another multi-dimension. It becomes a natural feeder system into our church. It becomes a natural feeder system that when somebody...